

**Council on Postsecondary Education
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**Focus on Reform:
Kentucky Adult Education**

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Good Morning, Vice Chairman Turner, Members of the Council, President Layzell, Colleagues and Visitors.

I appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about Kentucky Adult Education. For those of you whom I have not had the opportunity to meet, I want you to know some of my background.

I came to Kentucky from Springfield, Illinois, where I had a 30-year career in education and workforce development. Most recently, I served as Vice President for Adult Education and Workforce Development at the Illinois Community College Board. Previously, I served as Assistant to the Governor of Illinois for Workforce Development, and as Associate Director of Academic Affairs at the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

In the time we have this morning, I want to share with you:

- The role of adult education in meeting the educational, economic and social needs of the Commonwealth;
- The role of adult education in meeting the goals of the Public Agenda; and
- The role of KYAE in ensuring its contribution and in providing the educational services the public deserves.

To begin, we need a common understanding of adult education. It's a program of instruction and services to teach reading, writing and math to persons age 16 or older who are not in school, do not have a high school diploma, or do not have the basic literacy skills to fully participate in the economic and civic life of the Commonwealth.

Adult education includes instruction in basic literacy skills; preparation for the GED tests in reading, writing, math, science and social studies; English language instruction; workplace skills and literacy in the context of work; family literacy in which adults and children learn together while parenting skills are emphasized; transition to postsecondary education at a community college or university; or entry into employment.

Adult Education meets educational, economic and social needs.

Adult education provides critical benefits to both individual adults and our Commonwealth as a whole. Adult education provides students with the employment skills needed in the Kentucky economy; builds literacy proficiency so they can continue to learn new employment skills and knowledge; prepares them to be successful in postsecondary education; increases their ability to earn a sustainable wage and support their families without public subsidy; improves their contribution to the tax base that supports our communities; and teaches them to model learning for their children – the most important and most effective intervention to breaking the cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

People who can read are healthier, enter the correctional system with less frequency and return less often, are less likely to be on public assistance than those who do not read or do so poorly, experience less unemployment, and contribute more to social and economic stability.

Adult education is key to building a trained and trainable workforce and to improving the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians.

Adult Education contributes to the goals of the Public Agenda.

In 1998, the Kentucky Postsecondary Improvement Act, or House Bill 1, set Kentucky on the path to achieving economic opportunity and a standard of living above the national average by 2020. Two years later, the Kentucky Adult Education Act, Senate Bill 1, acknowledged adult literacy as a fundamental barrier to every major challenge facing Kentucky. Among other reforms, SB1 placed Kentucky Adult Education within the Council on Postsecondary Education to elevate the priority of adult education and the importance of its students in meeting the goals of HB1.

The statistics paint a picture of why SB1 acknowledged the challenges of adult educational attainment in Kentucky:

- According to the 2003 State Assessment of Adult Literacy, 42 percent of working-age Kentuckians read at the two lowest levels of literacy (below the level considered to be adequate for high school graduation or employment in meaningful jobs).
- According to the 2000 U.S. Census, in just over half of Kentucky counties, more than 30 percent of the population has less than a high school credential.
- Of all ninth graders in Kentucky, 85 percent do not graduate from college.
- In 2002, 54 percent of students entering college in Kentucky were underprepared in at least one subject.
- There are not enough high school students currently enrolled each year to meet the 2020 baccalaureate degree goals of the Council's Public Agenda.

At the same time, 60 percent of today's jobs require some amount of postsecondary education; by 2020, the percent will be even higher.

These adults have been lost from the educational system. Re-engaging them in the educational process and raising their academic skills and their educational aspirations are critical if Kentucky is to raise its standard of living and reach the goals of HB1 and the Public Agenda by 2020.

What will it take for Kentucky Adult Education to do its part to meet these goals?

A preliminary analysis suggests to us that:

- We must increase the adult college participation rate from 3.6 percent to 4.5 percent.
- We must more than double the annual number of GED graduates – from 10,000 to 26,000 per year.
- We must increase the college-going rate of GED graduates from 19 percent to 43 percent.

These are lofty goals. They will require a concerted and collaborative effort from all of our adult education partners. The good news is that Kentucky has already generated strong momentum that must be maintained. Since 2000, Kentucky Adult Education has experienced enrollment growth well over 100 percent, produced more than 60,000 GEDs and increased the GED college-going rate from 12 percent to 19 percent. For six of six years, Kentucky Adult Education has met performance targets set by the U.S. Department of Education, helping the Commonwealth to receive \$8 million in federal funding for outstanding performance.

Strengthening the Adult Education services the public deserves.

Kentucky Adult Education is known across the country for its innovation and achievement. It is my goal to preserve that good reputation and build upon it.

Since I began my position about two months ago, I have toured the Commonwealth and met and talked with more than 200 adult education program directors and instructors. I have asked them to share their valuable insight and ideas to help guide our next steps. I shared with them three priority areas in which action will enhance the administration of the system and, more important, the outcomes of our students – teaching and learning, accountability, and dialogue and collaboration.

Teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are fundamental to adult education's mission; therefore, at the state level, we will enhance the role of KYAE in providing the very best tools and knowledge to adult educators so they can continuously improve their teaching and student learning. We will continue to develop curriculum standards that raise learning expectations and help ensure success in the workplace and in postsecondary education.

We will equip instructors to use research-based instructional strategies designed for adults to help students maximize their achievement. We will also help local programs better advise and counsel adult students of their educational options for the future.

For adult education administrators, we will provide assistance in administrative, student and fiscal reporting and management so we can report the successes of students with confidence and continue to show good stewardship of state and federal resources.

Accountability. Accountability for both student outcomes and fiscal management is critical. The KYAE data system must be the best it can be and have the capability of providing KYAE and the Council the data we need to identify our strengths and weaknesses and improve performance. Accurate data are essential as adult education continues to contribute to the ambitious goals of the Public Agenda and essential in communicating with the legislature on funding needs and the return on investment of state funds. Continuing to meet the accountability requirements of the U.S. Department of Education is important to retain both our funding and our position as a leader in Adult Education.

Collaboration and dialogue. To be highly effective, KYAE must be in collaboration and dialogue with local programs and with federal and state funding bodies. We must meet the requirements of this highly regulated federal program and, within that framework, make policy that allows, assists and requires programs to serve students well.

Our experienced and knowledgeable staff can be an even greater resource to programs and help local programs reach better performance and efficiency. We will ask outstanding educators in the field to provide input to our state policy research and development so we can accurately target local issues that need to be addressed.

New approaches and initiatives will place KYAE within easy reach of all programs, provide leadership in delivering targeted and accessible professional development for instructors and program directors, create advisory groups and task forces to gather field input and agreement on critical issues, and KYAE will fully participate in the state P-16 Council and CPE efforts, such as the remediation and dual credit task forces and technology initiatives.

KYAE also has a significant responsibility to work with the U.S. Department of Education on national research and development efforts and to advocate policy that benefits our programs and our students. This is an especially important responsibility as Kentucky is viewed as a national leader, which gives us the opportunity to influence national policy debate.

It is a privilege to come to Kentucky where so much priority has been placed on building a strong adult education system and where state as well as federal funds are

being invested in the program infrastructure to continue adult education's momentum toward excellence.

The Council has put in place a dedicated and talented adult education staff that is not reluctant to be creative and to set high standards for themselves, the adult education system and for the adult education students of the Commonwealth. I am honored to have joined this staff and the Council on Postsecondary Education.

Thank you for your time and attention and your continued support of Kentucky Adult Education.